

# **REGIONAL CONFLICT IN 2025: WORKSHOP REPORT**

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The views, opinions and/or findings contained in this report are those of the author, and should not be construed as official National Intelligence Council position, policy or decision.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This is a report on a workshop convened by Long Term Strategy Group at the office of CENTRA Technology in Arlington, Virginia, on Monday, 5 May, 2008, at the behest of the National Intelligence Council's Long-Range Analysis Unit. The purpose of the workshop was to assemble a group of regional subject-matter experts to evaluate several possible scenarios of regional conflict in 2025. The report captures the key dynamics and findings identified in the course of the workshop. The four scenarios, a main scenario and three excursions, were generated through two previous workshops that considered the security environment and the character of conflict in 2025. Through these scenarios workshop participants considered the nature and impact of strategic interactions in the context of WMD and missile proliferation in the region from Egypt, Turkey, and Israel in the west, up to and including Pakistan in the east. Participants were given a brief paper outlining the scenarios and key questions prior to the workshop. Both this read-ahead paper and the workshop agenda can be found in the Appendix of this report.

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## **INTRODUCTION: OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY**

The objective of this workshop was to better understand the characteristics of conflict in one area of the world that is likely to remain central to the security of the United States, the region from Egypt, Turkey, and Israel, in the west, up to and including Pakistan in the east; and Saudi Arabia in the south.

The choice of this region was neither arbitrary nor the result of the high level of interest in Iraq and Iran today. Rather, this region was highlighted by the discussion of trends out to the year 2025 in the two previous workshops on global trends and trends in the character of warfare, respectively.

What were the findings of the workshop on global trends? That workshop focused on the demographics of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine, which will have large numbers of young males relative to the older portions of those populations, who may be unemployed and provide potential recruits for groups committed to violent change of the status quo. Iran, on the other hand, will have a more stable and aging population, but reduced oil production. The economies of India and China will grow rapidly, and keep the demand for oil high and growing. The result is a world in which the oil of this region remains central to the global economy, while the internal demographic and economics of the region may lead to continued internal instability. Because of trends favoring increasing human mobility and the relative openness of educational institutions in the developed world, technological knowledge relevant to the production of disruptive weapons will continue to proliferate in this region.

The second workshop highlighted the decline in conventional interstate warfare, at the same time that the diffusion of technology relevant to military capabilities increased the ability of smaller states and non-state actors to engage in violent challenges to the status quo, sometimes covertly or with plausible deniability. If one posits a gradual withdrawal of the United States military from Iraq, as was done by that workshop, there emerges the possibility of new alignments shaped by the internal dynamics of the Persian Gulf region and by great powers that could play an increased role in the region, in accord with their interests and the new opportunities.

Together, the two workshops suggested that the region selected for further study would be a region of high interest to the world, populated by state and non-state actors that could have the ability and desire to challenge the status quo, and which would have access to powerful military technologies.

In addition, this workshop was asked to pay particular attention to the impact of the proliferation of nuclear weapons, weapons that could be developed, tested, and used or misused, deliberately or accidentally. The impact of the successful development of Iranian nuclear weapons was a particular question, as was the issue of the impact of a loss of government control over Pakistani nuclear weapons.





## **MAIN SCENARIO: BASELINE PROJECTIONS AND REGIONAL CONFLICT**

Looking out to 2025, the workshop was asked to think about the nature of interactions in this region if Iran had by 2015 developed the ability to construct a nuclear weapon and by 2025 had a small number—about 10—of nuclear weapons that could be delivered by ballistic or cruise missiles. The overall question that was posed was whether the behavior of other states in reaction to these developments would lead to stable nuclear or non-nuclear deterrent relations between pairs of states, such as Israel and Iran, or Iran and Iraq, or whether other factors might lead to higher levels of instability. It was suggested that a multi-polar nuclear environment, in which nuclear armed states lived close to each other and were armed with nuclear delivery systems that were not easily distinguished from non-nuclear delivery systems might be more unstable than the current environment.

The discussion tended to focus on two separate but related questions. The first was the question of new dynamics internal to the region, and the second was the character of the actions of powers external to the region, as well as the consequences of those actions for actors within the region.

With regard to the dynamics internal to the region, there was a useful discussion of how exactly Iran went forward with its nuclear program, and the way other states reacted during the period before Iran developed its nuclear weapons capability. The nuclear taboo might constrain states and affect their views of the utility of nuclear weapons, and the United States and other older nuclear powers might move down the road to nuclear weapons abolition. This might affect the dynamic within the region and push it more towards the development of the peaceful uses of nuclear power. For example, it was suggested that projects now being discussed by Abu Dhabi, for peaceful, well monitored nuclear power plants, might set the tone for regional responses to Iranian uranium enrichment and nuclear power programs. It was suggested that states such as Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia did not have the internal organizational capacity to mount a large scale nuclear program on their own, and would only be able to proceed along those lines with international support and cooperation. This would mean that there would be a reaction to the Iranian nuclear program, but that it would not lead quickly or automatically to new national nuclear weapons programs. This pathway would be more likely if Iran never overtly or unambiguously tested a nuclear weapon, but stuck to a strategy similar to the strategy imputed to Japan, of stopping short of constructing or testing a nuclear weapon, but retaining the ability rapidly to produce one if needed. It was argued that overt testing of a nuclear weapon by Iran would force Iran to admit that it had lied, was in violation of its NPT obligations, and would be subject to international sanctions and pressures. This view was based on an understanding of Iran that transcended the particular personalities of the current regime, according to which Iran exhibits a longstanding preference for ambiguous strategies, has prioritized self-sufficiency, and harbors concerns in all of Central Asia. On this argument, by 2025, Iran would have an ambiguous nuclear weapons posture and would compete for influence in the region, but there would not be an international competition to produce overt nuclear arsenals.

A somewhat different view was also expressed. Iran itself under Ahmadinejad has favored overt threats, and has obtained some benefits from this. There might be a perceived benefit to Iranian

leaders, in Iranian domestic politics as well as in international politics, of having an overt nuclear weapons posture. Iran has been observed to “overreach” in its foreign relations. The result might be an overt nuclear weapons test. Turkey and Saudi Arabia would regard as unacceptable a region in which Iran had nuclear weapons and they did not. While the Iranian nuclear program is not now the main concern of the Turkish national security elite, Turkey would not allow Iran to become the dominant power in the region without making an effort to maintain its own predominant position. A competition between Turkey and Iran for influence over the oil producing areas of this region, and the pipelines by means of which the oil is exported, particularly as domestic Iranian oil production declined, could emerge. Saudi Arabia would have serious concerns about a nuclear armed Iran. Saudi Arabia was also seen to have the resources, foreign connections, and relationship with Pakistan to facilitate the rapid acquisition of nuclear weapons. Even if Saudi Arabia did not want, ultimately to acquire nuclear weapons, it would not want Iran to be sure about this. Turkey and Saudi Arabia, therefore, would begin building the capacity to generate their own fissile material early in the period 2008-2025, if they had not already done so. Those countries would take advantage of the nuclear enrichment technologies that had become more widely available since Iran began its enrichment program in the late 1990s, and so would be able to develop their programs more rapidly and with fewer false starts and costs than the Iranians experienced. In addition, it was argued, some time before 2025, Iraq might have a stable government and increased oil production, allowing it to re-emerge as a rival to Iran. To prevent this, Iran might retain an interest in keeping levels of instability in Iraq high. On this view, therefore, the region by 2015 would be “spring loaded” to generate two (Turkey and Saudi Arabia) or more (Egypt and Iraq) additional nuclear weapons states at the point when Iran became an overt nuclear weapons state. The result by 2025 would be a region with five (Israel, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia) to seven nuclear weapons states, some of which could be ambiguous or opaque nuclear powers, some of which could be overt. The point was made that India regarded itself as intimately involved in this region, in which case there would be six to nine nuclear powers, with arsenals of greatly different size, technological sophistication, and transparency.

The world portrayed in the main, or baseline, scenario is, of course, only one of several worlds compatible with the trends identified. The future security environment could be complicated by a range of contingencies that were introduced at the workshop under the rubric of “excursion” scenarios. The three excursions that were discussed, it was noted, might flow sequentially from the main scenario, or they could emerge in parallel. That is, the main scenario could unfold and at the end, the excursions could occur, or the excursions could occur earlier and divert the world away from the path described in the baseline scenario.

## EXCURSION A: CONFLICT UNDER A NUCLEAR UMBRELLA

The discussion of this initial “excursion” from the main scenario proceeded from the insight that a steady-state arms race could degenerate into war under certain conditions – if, for instance, Iran and Saudi Arabia came into conflict over energy resources transiting the Persian Gulf. The precise *casus belli* would be less important than the perception of actors in the region that conditions were becoming dangerous. With low levels of interstate trust and a high number of well-armed states co-existing in close proximity, the potential for escalation and misunderstanding appeared high.

For instance, if Iran has achieved a small nuclear stockpile by 2025, it was thought, Tehran might be more assertive in trying to regulate or exert claims over the transit of oil supplies in the Gulf. In the course of a dispute over maritime rights or off-shore oil reserves, it is conceivable that Iran might launch a cruise missile from land at an off-shore oil platform, a commercial vessel, or a ship belonging to the navy of one of the Gulf states. A Gulf state – particularly one under a broader security umbrella – might then put its missiles on alert and aim them at a major Iranian base from which the missile might have been launched. This move could be designed to deter further Iranian action – rather than constituting a prelude to an actual strike. By, the Saudi Arabian state could have acquired a small nuclear arsenal. Its missiles, therefore, might by 2025, be dual-capable, creating ambiguity for Iran about the nature of the warhead that was being prepared for launch. Even if the missiles were not suspected of carrying nuclear warheads, Iran might be insecure about the vulnerability of its limited nuclear weapons stockpile and read the alert as preparatory to an attack on its arsenal. In general, the multipolar nature of competitive interactions in this environment could engender complicated dynamics that the United States and other powers accustomed to dyadic relationships would be prone to misunderstand.

One potentially destabilizing element of the dynamics considered in this excursion scenario, it was noted, would be the small size of the new nuclear arsenals of Iran and of states like Saudi Arabia. These small arsenals might be perceived to invite a first strike by an adversary seeking to neutralize them. This, in turn, might lead to fears of being the target of a surprise attack, and so to military action. Such fears were, in fact, part of the sequence of events leading to the decision by Israel to launch a pre-emptive air attack on Egypt in 1967. Egyptian defense advisers on the eve of Egypt’s 1967 surprise attack on Israel, not sure of the extent of Israeli progress towards completing a nuclear weapon, decided to overfly the Israeli reactor at Dimona. Israelis then assembled their nuclear weapons, and for this reason and others, decided to destroy the Egyptian air force. Similarly, the Pakistani government feared an Indian strike on its incipient nuclear weapons facility at Kahuta in 1984 and 1985.

Following this line of reasoning, a question arose about whether in an environment of rival new and nascent nuclear powers in 2025, all missile tests would be crisis-provoking. General recognition of the potential for demonstrations of capabilities to be particularly destabilizing, or susceptible to escalatory misunderstandings, in the environment of 2025 might create an opportunity, it was noted. The United States, a regional power, or a consortium of states could fashion a multilateral agreement to ban – or, at least, strictly control – testing.

In addition to the small size of nuclear arsenals, another destabilizing feature of this scenario would be the way that a crisis might affect command, control, and custody arrangements. Most new nuclear powers conceal their stockpiles and do not place them under operational military commanders. In a crisis, the workshop concluded, a country fearing attack might disperse its weapons, mate them with their delivery systems, and put them under the control of operational military commands at a moment of heightened threat perception. The process of moving nuclear matériel could actually telegraph its location, affording hostile forces a target to detect with satellite reconnaissance and other intelligence sources, and create greater risks of accidental or unauthorized launches.

An accidental detonation under these circumstances would generate a reaction from neighboring and affected states, at least some of which would be skeptical of an explanation of the development as accidental.

Attempts to deter a threatening power by means of a conventional missile test, it was further noted, might be confusing or counterproductive in that the intended audience would be unlikely to be the only audience to detect, assimilate, and consider responding in kind to such a test. Asymmetries in the accuracy of different states' intelligence and warning systems will add a further degree of complication to crisis dynamics in the region in 2025, workshop participants argued. In the past, states such as the Soviet Union and the United States relayed information to regional allies – for instance, to Egypt and Israel, respectively, in the 1973 war. In 2025, the United States and Israel might have the best intelligence, but, in the event that either power elected to share its intelligence, the data might not be trusted.

Participants noted that this might create another opportunity for the United States or others to organize a consortium of states to participate in a common intelligence and warning satellite architecture. Because information delivered from the United States would be greeted skeptically by certain powers, participants in the consortium could be given an opportunity to design and man the parts of this architecture that they would find most useful.

A final consideration about how a conflict in the Middle East or South Asia in 2025 might be particularly destabilizing concerns the kind of response that a chemical or biological attack would invite. While the United States would be unlikely to employ chemical or biological weapons under almost any conceivable circumstances, it was suggested, regional powers might not exhibit the same restraint. The use of chlorine attacks in the current conflict in Iraq, as well as Saddam Hussein's gassing of the Kurds, indicates that the taboo against chem/bio attacks might not hold equal force for all actors in the region. While Hizbollah so far has not pursued chemical or biological capabilities, it was noted, this trend may change by 2025.

## EXCURSION B: ESCALATING TO DEESCALATE?

The discussion of conventional conflict in a nuclear-proliferated environment in the first excursion inspired a discussion of the conditions under which a nuclear, or other WMD-type, weapon might be used in conflict. A range of possible usages were discussed – from a nuclear test over a state’s own territory, to a demonstration nuclear detonation outside the home country, to a transfer of nuclear capabilities to a non-state actor for its use were discussed. A model that was cited is current Russian doctrine, which explores the use of nuclear escalation to compensate for a relative deficit of conventional military capabilities against a peer opponent. In theory, by using a tactical nuclear weapon against a state such as China or the United States, Moscow could force a de-escalation, engendering a cessation of hostilities by raising the costs of fighting so high that an adversary would be forced to cease fire. Pakistan, which, like Russia, faces a conventionally superior potential adversary in India, has produced a doctrine of escalating with nuclear weapons to end a conflict. It was noted that Israel considered testing a nuclear weapon to force Syria and Egypt to retreat from their aggressive positions just before the 1967 war, though the recommendation was rejected in favor of a policy of conventional attack and nuclear opacity – perhaps in part because Israel was able to achieve conventional superiority in the conflict.

Turning to the issue of a nuclear Iran in 2025, the workshop participants noted that Iran’s conventional power might render nuclear escalation unnecessary in many cases, but that such an escalation could be used *in extremis* to end a conflict. If Israel suffered an attack involving radiation dispersal and was detected preparing to retaliate against Iran, for instance, the workshop participants thought that this would be a situation in which Tehran would consider escalating to the level of overtly testing a nuclear weapon. Alternatively, if Hizbollah sustained a massive non-nuclear attack or a series of decapitation strikes against key leaders at the hands of Israel and looked to be on the verge of defeat, this, too, it was suggested, could prompt Tehran to conduct a nuclear test or engage in further escalation. A minority viewpoint was that Tehran might use nuclear weapons not just in the face of a severe international setback but also if it were emboldened by a series of victories – for instance, Hizbollah success in taking over a government or inflicting mass casualty attacks on Israel.

Workshop participants also judged that Iran might be disposed publicly to test its nuclear weapon if the regime faced a serious internal threat. On this theory, a challenge to the regime could induce Iranian leaders to demonstrate their nuclear achievement – both to intimidate rebels or dissidents and to appeal to popular opinion by showing that domestic economic sacrifices had been merited. It was suggested that the notion of Iran’s comfort with, or preference for, ambiguity about nuclear capabilities – and about other strategic issues – might be overstated. India developed a nuclear weapon in secret and then, many years after the capability had been achieved, engaged in observable tests. Iran might not delay, but might conduct a nuclear test as soon as it could, not in reaction to a particular development at home or abroad but just for the sake of knowing that the weapon worked as designed, to gain political capital, or to intimidate regional neighbors. Workshop participants debated whether Iran would have to withdraw from the NPT and admit that it had had a nuclear weapons program at the same time that it publicly tested a weapon, or attempt to hide under the fig leave of a peaceful nuclear explosion. Most agreed that if Iran tests, Israel would react by abandoning opacity and demonstrating its own capacity.

Finally, Iran could escalate not just by demonstrating its nuclear capabilities but also by handing them off to a third party, the workshop attendees noted. To the question of whether, or under what conditions, Iran might supply a non-state proxy group with weapons of mass destruction, the answer that emerged was, again, if the regime looked to be on the verge of collapse.

## **EXCURSION C: IMPLICATIONS OF LOOSE NUKES OR A WMD TERRORIST ATTACK**

The workshop's third excursion discussion examined the effects of a loss of central state control over a nuclear arsenal or an attack by terrorists armed with weapons of mass destruction. Both contingencies are so horrific and currently so difficult to think about that workshop participants failed to arrive at consensus views about the character of their respective aftermaths. Instead, both a "loose nukes" situation and a WMD terrorist attack were thought to give rise to a range of possible reactions.

### **LOOSE NUKES**

The workshop participants oriented the discussion of loose nukes around a breakdown of military rule in Pakistan and agreed that the following questions would arise: Who now controls the nuclear weapons? Can the United States locate them? Are the guardians of the weapons unified, or do different custodians have competing agendas? What is the chance that nuclear matériel might leak from the custodians' control? The fact that by 2025, it is possible that further advances in weaponization and miniaturization will have rendered nuclear weapons smaller and more mobile increases the challenge of addressing these questions.

In the particular case of internal political conflict in Pakistan, questions about the reaction of external actors such as China, India, and Russia, as well as about domestic divisions along ethnic lines, arise. The workshop participants saw a potential for fissures within the Pakistani army and within the general population – between Pashstuns and Punjabs, for instance. The workshop participants argued that the problem of securing Pakistan's weapons would exceed the capacity of any one state, including the United States. A consortium could be formed to handle the problem, though it was suggested that India would resist intervening in Pakistan with ground forces. A further obstacle to forming such a consortium would be that its prospective members would have difficulty collaborating because each would have an interest in working with different elements in Pakistan. External actors might be backing competing groups.

It was also noted that an A.Q. Khan type of unofficial proliferation of nuclear technology could occur in Iran even in the absence of a coup. If the fear of selling nuclear weapons to people who might then use them against Iran deterred the sale of weapons technology to countries near Iran, sales could go to extra-regional customers – for instance, Venezuela or Belarus – that would not be expected to turn around and target Iran.

### **TERRORIST USE OF WMD**

The range of reactions to a terrorist WMD attack that were identified by the workshop participants hinged on issues of time frames, of the psychology of nation-states, and of the victim regime's ability to identify the perpetrator. If the attack were conducted against a democracy by a group that could somehow be identified (with some known signature – a signature that could either be technical, associated with the material used, or behavioral/organizational, associated with the manner in which the attack was executed) it is likely that elected officials would seek to

respond quickly. While smaller-scale terrorist attacks such as the Pan Am Lockerbie attack, were followed by lengthy investigations to find the perpetrators, the workshop participants believed that an event that kills thousands would elicit an immediate response.

On the violent end of the spectrum of possible responses, even in the absence of proof about the identity of, or supplier of arms to, the perpetrator, one could imagine a target government executing a retaliatory strike on a known state sponsor of terror or a site of known value to terrorists. It was noted that most consideration of WMD attacks focuses on the United States or Israel as the target, but what if the victim were Iran? It seems improbable that Iran would postpone responding militarily during a protracted search for the attackers. If Israel were attacked and no response was immediately evident, it was further noted, enemies of the United States and Israel might take this as validation and proceed with follow-on attacks. At the very least, such a development would have a negative influence on American alliance interests, casting the credibility and value of a US defense commitment into question. For these reasons, it seemed evident to at least some at the workshop that an attack involving weapons of mass destruction could yield a spasm of violent effects as the taboo on their use will have been broken.

On the other end of the spectrum, it was suggested that there would be a renewed impulse in favor of world government in the wake of a devastating WMD event. One workshop participant cited Herman Kahn's conjecture that the use of a single nuclear weapon would induce global leaders to come together and fashion a new international regime. It is conceivable that in the aftermath of an anonymous attack, governments sympathetic to the victim could demand that all states with nuclear weapons, declared or undeclared, allow inspectors to take samples from their arsenal for the purpose of tracing the fissile material used in the attack. That could be the beginning of a new, international counter-proliferation effort. In the case of a chemical or biological attack, it was suggested, one could imagine a new commitment to the regulation of science, including much more stringent controls on the transport of potentially dual-use technologies and materials, as well as much greater attention to the mobility and training of researchers and engineers.

Finally, one workshop participant proposed denial as a plausible response to an attack on a state such as Israel. Psychological shock and the human tendency to distance oneself from "the other," which in this case would consist of the victim of a catastrophic attack, might lead the rest of the world to try to ignore or suppress the fact of Israel's devastation. This line of thinking, however, appears to discount the potentially undeniable ramifications of an Israeli second strike.



## CONCLUSIONS

How might developments and the behavior of states external to the Middle East and South Asia between now and 2025 affect the main scenario and excursions? How would different US declaratory deterrence policies that could be adopted by 2025 affect the scenarios, if at all? These were the questions considered at the end of the workshop.

Participants converged on the idea that the way the contingencies played out would depend on how East and South Asian international politics evolved in the period before 2025. The India-China relationship, it was suggested, could improve or deteriorate, depending in part on whether tensions over Taiwan get resolved. If Taiwan were to cease being a flashpoint, this would remove some of the rationale for the US's Pacific naval presence and increase Delhi's concerns over Chinese preeminence in the Indian Ocean region. It was further noted that current economic and political-military trends suggest that the Southeast Asian Five plus Japan will play increasingly important geo-strategic roles between now and 2025.

Climate change, energy, and space issues were also considered relevant to the future of the Middle East and South Asia out to 2025. Climate change could precipitate discontinuous developments, as, for instance, geographically low-lying areas in Asia and the Gulf may find themselves under water due to global warming. Meantime, it was suggested that the growing energy consumption of India and China could lead them to dominate oil and gas flows from Russia and the Middle East, while Japan continues to rely on the Middle East as well as on new deep-oil finds in the South and East China Seas and the Pacific, and the United States focuses on supplies in South America, Canada. Japan and India may continue to grow closer geopolitically, as they seek to mutually assure sea lines of communication and access to energy in a region increasingly dominated by China. This leaves out Europe, which may find itself with diminishing access as regional military capabilities continue to decline. In addition, it was noted that new deep sea finds in Southeast Asia could spark conflicts over resources there. Finally, a workshop participant argued that novel commercial relationships of strategic significance may be forged as new states enter the space domain between now and 2025. The drive toward orbit would be motivated both by prestige interests and the need to access intelligence and surveillance capabilities afforded by satellites. But rather than develop expensive indigenous launch facilities, the new space players would be likely to pay states such as Russia and China to launch their equipment.

Finally, though workshop participants did not have a chance to assess the implications of specific alternative US declaratory deterrence policies, they did appear to agree that the American attitude toward proliferation would remain globally influential between now and 2025 – at least insofar as any perceived reduction in American vigilance would encourage other states to lower theirs. When asked to assess overall whether the dynamics considered at the workshop would be likely to increase or reduce prospects for global stability over the next seventeen years, virtually all the participants predicted heightened instability due to the increased complications of, and potential for misperceptions in, a world of geographically proximate new nuclear actors and multi-polar interactions.



## APPENDIX

### READ-AHEAD PAPER

#### Introduction

The workshop on 5 May is the third in a series of workshops aimed at illuminating the character of the security environment in 2025 in support of the National Intelligence Council's 2025 global futures project. The discussion below is meant to stimulate thought about how WMD proliferation could shape strategic interactions in the zone from Egypt and Turkey in the west to India and Central Asia in the east in the 2025 time-frame. Previous workshops on demographic, economic, technological, and other trends have illuminated the contours of a world that might exist in 2025 if some currently observable trends continue and intersect with plausible discontinuities from the current environment. Specifically, the "main scenario" below arises from the continuation of current trends toward the proliferation of missile and WMD technologies and from an assumption that the Middle East will continue to be home to strategically important resources. But the scenario also reflects an assumption that the United States is perceived to be withdrawing, or substantially reducing its forward presence, as a result of a decision to shift the US strategic posture to one of off-shore balancing. Following the presentation of this main scenario and questions associated with it are three "excursions" that are meant to suggest contingencies that could arise in conjunction with the unfolding of the main scenario and possibly in conjunction with one another.

#### Main Scenario: Arms Race in the Middle East

Since 2008, Iran has continued to make progress on its nuclear capabilities and has continued to develop a robust missile force. Uncertainties over Iranian intentions to produce a nuclear weapon and the state and disposition of Iran's nuclear program have resulted in no military actions being taken by outside powers to preemptively intercede against the Iranian nuclear effort. However, other states in the region—concerned about Iran's ultimate intentions to attain regional hegemony and the future of US security commitments—hedge their bets by modernizing their own conventional military forces, seeking alternative security arrangements with other powers, and pursuing civilian nuclear energy programs.

- The United States transitions to an "off-shore" security provider for the Middle East, limiting its military footprint in the region following a drawdown in its forces from Iraq in 2010.
- The Gulf Arab states perceive the US force drawdown as a US withdrawal from the region and seek to internationalize Gulf security in response by establishing security arrangements with other external powers such as the EU, Russia, India, and China. As a result, a rivalry for influence in the Middle East emerges among the great powers.
- China and other powers are willing to trade sophisticated weapons for energy agreements propelling an arms race in the region.
- A military competition between strike and counterstrike/missile defenses emerges in the region. In addition, Iran continues to fund, equip, and train proxies in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories.

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- Iran makes continual improvements to the range and accuracy of its missile force. It also makes progress towards the development of ICBM capabilities through work on producing space launch vehicles. Other states in the region also improve their missile strike capabilities. Saudi Arabia, for example, upgrades its counterstrike capabilities through the purchase of air-launched land-attack cruise missiles.

After 2015 it becomes increasingly clear that Iran has the capability to build missile deliverable nuclear weapons if it chooses to do so. This generates a number of counter responses in the region.

- Israel seeks to improve its ability to monitor Iranian missile forces, establishes indications and warning procedures for a potential nuclear missile attack, continues to upgrade its missile defense capabilities, and establishes a sea-based second strike capability.
- Syria continues to maintain its missile and chemical and biological weapons capabilities.
- Egypt and Turkey begin pursuing clandestine nuclear weapon programs.
- Saudi Arabia improves its conventional strike forces and has formally established a security alliance with Pakistan. The Saudi Government makes public references to how this alliance provides Saudi Arabia “options” in responding to a potential nuclear threat posed by Iran. Pakistan increases its nuclear warhead production and continues to develop longer-range missiles that can reach parts of the Middle East. Pakistan is concerned by the threats to its security posed by both Iran and India.
- India reacts to the increases in the Pakistani arsenal and the potential for new nuclear powers in the Middle East by increasing its production of warheads and missiles. Tensions between China and India arise over competing interests in the Middle East, border issues, and China’s continued support to Pakistan, including sales of nuclear reactors.

In 2025, it is widely believed that Iran has successfully developed a small nuclear arsenal that can be delivered by mobile missiles among other means. Iran has yet to publicly declare itself a nuclear weapon power or to openly test a nuclear weapon. Iran has become more assertive in the region primarily through the use of its proxies to spread its influence in the Middle East and Central Asia. Iran also continues to pursue anti-access capabilities to threaten shipping and energy flows through the Persian Gulf. There is growing concern about Iranian intentions to seek regional hegemony and about the security of energy supplies in the Middle East and Central Asia. Iran becomes increasingly paranoid about efforts by the United States, Israel, Saudi Arabia and others to contain Iran and prevent it from transitioning to what it perceives to be its rightful place in the region.

- Tensions in the Middle East and South Asia rise as a result of competition over resources, changing political and military dynamics, and ongoing internal conflicts between state military forces and proxies.

### Questions

- What are the implications of further proliferation of WMD and long-range delivery systems in the Middle East and South Asia for regional security dynamics, stability, and conflict?

- How may deterrence calculations and escalation dynamics change as a result of the changing security environment? Does a new form of M.A.D.—one that assures at least mutual pain if not destruction—take hold in the region?
- What will be the character of a deterrence relationship between Israel and Iran in 2025? What new security dynamics might emerge in 2025 that will affect the deterrence relationship between India and Pakistan?
- How does further proliferation affect foreign perception of the ability of the United States and its allies to employ all elements of national power—especially the military component—to achieve its policy goals in the region?
- What will be foreign perceptions regarding how a (near) nuclear weapon capability changes a state's ability to pursue its strategic goals and influence regional/political/military dynamics?
- What kind of arms race might emerge in the region in the future? Will additional nuclear powers spark further proliferation of nuclear weapons or other forms of WMD?
- What new alliances/alignments might emerge in this scenario? By 2025, would Israel and the moderate Gulf Arab States align against Iran? Would China support Iran or Saudi Arabia? What would Russia's role be? If Saudi Arabia and Pakistan aligned against a hegemonic Iran, how would India respond?
- Will new alliances or security agreements form around missile defense requirements?

#### **Excursion A: Conflict in the Middle East under a Nuclear Umbrella**

In 2025 naval confrontations between Iran and the Arab Gulf States in the Persian Gulf occur in the midst of increasing provocative rhetoric over territorial disputes in the region. The United States is being drawn into the crisis to ensure the flow of oil from the Gulf. Renewed fighting has also erupted between Israeli forces and Hizbollah in Lebanon. There is growing concern from outside powers such as India and China about the potential for disruptions in the Middle East that would reduce their energy security. In response to the heightened tensions, Iran puts its naval and air forces on high alert and begins to disperse its mobile missile systems, some of which may be nuclear capable.

- How do crisis management, escalation, and military operations function in a conflict that erupts from a naval confrontation in the Gulf when multiple nuclear actors are involved?
- How might the crisis escalate in this situation? What might happen if Iran attempts to use a ballistic missile test in this situation to demonstrate its resolve?
- What are the security issues associated with multiple nuclear powers existing in close proximity to each other and equipped with dual-capable weapon systems? Will military strikes against an adversary's missile forces risk escalation to a nuclear conflict?
- How might Iran use its proxies in a situation of heightened tensions that is occurring under a nuclear umbrella? Would Iran's proxies feel they can act with less restraint because of Iran's nuclear capabilities? Would Iran raise the bar on what weapons are given to its proxies, providing chemical or other weapons of mass destruction to Hizbollah, for example, because it feels it has a nuclear deterrent?
- How might India, Pakistan, China and/or Russia get pulled into a broader Middle East conflict?

### **Excursion B: The Use of Nuclear Weapons to Deescalate a Conventional Conflict**

Iran, fearing the crisis is escalating to a large-scale military conflict with the United States and other states in the region, tests a nuclear weapon in an attempt to deter future attacks and deescalate the crisis.

- What would be the consequences of Iran's testing of a nuclear weapon during a crisis in an attempt to deter foreign military intervention and deescalate the situation?
- How would the rest of the region react to Iran's nuclear test?
- Is there an analogy to be drawn between Iran's approach in this situation and a Pakistani strategy of using nuclear weapons to attempt to deescalate a conventional military incursion by India?
- Under what other conditions – involving states and/or non-state actors – might we see the use of nuclear weapons in a Middle East/South Asia conflict/crisis in 2025?

### **Excursion C: Loose Nukes and the Consequences**

In 2025 the spread of nuclear technology in the Middle East and South Asia raises renewed global concerns about controlling the security of nuclear weapons or materials and the potential for accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction. In addition, the development of clandestine delivery options by some states and continued terrorist activity raise the possibility of non-state actors obtaining nuclear or other WMD capabilities. The potential for the emergence of a failed or failing nuclear state in 2025 also increases as the number of nuclear states grows.

- What new security measures, arms control agreements, non-proliferation efforts, or other forms of international cooperation might emerge by 2025 in response to the spread of nuclear capabilities?
- By 2025 might we see military interventions to secure a failing state's nuclear weapon or energy infrastructures? If so what could be the broader political-military consequences of such actions? In 2025, what might be the regional and international reaction to internal political disruption in a nuclear state such as Iran or Pakistan?
- What would be the implications of an "A.Q. Khan" scenario in Iran involving a leak from Iran's nuclear infrastructure to a non-state actor such as Hizbollah?
- What might be the consequences of a terrorist WMD attack in the region in 2025 under this scenario? How might such an act lead to a broader conflict or instability in the region?

## **AGENDA**

### Regional Conflict in 2025 – 5 May 2008

#### **How could WMD proliferation shape strategic interactions in the zone from Egypt and Turkey in the west to India and Central Asia in the east in the 2025 time frame?**

##### **0800-0815: Introduction: Workshop Goals and Methodology**

##### **0815-0945: Main Scenario: Arms Race in the Middle East**

- How may deterrence calculations and escalation dynamics change as a result of the changing security environment? Does a new form of M.A.D.—one that assures at least mutual pain if not destruction—take hold in the region?
- How does further proliferation affect foreign perception of the ability of the United States and its allies to employ all elements of national power—especially the military component—to achieve its policy goals in the region?
- What will be foreign perceptions regarding how a (near) nuclear weapon capability changes a state's ability to pursue its strategic goals and influence regional/political/military dynamics?
- What kind of arms race might emerge in the region in the future? Will additional nuclear powers spark further proliferation of nuclear weapons or other forms of WMD?
- What new alliances/alignments might emerge in this scenario? By 2025, would Israel and the moderate Gulf Arab States align against Iran? Would China support Iran or Saudi Arabia? What would Russia's role be? If Saudi Arabia and Pakistan aligned against a hegemonic Iran, how would India respond?

0945-1000: Break

##### **1000-1115: Excursion A: Conflict in the Middle East under a Nuclear Umbrella**

- What are the security issues associated with multiple nuclear powers existing in close proximity to each other and equipped with dual-capable weapon systems? Will military strikes against an adversary's missile forces risk escalation to a nuclear conflict?
- How might Iran use its proxies in a situation of heightened tensions that is occurring under a nuclear umbrella? Would Iran's proxies feel they can act with less restraint because of Iran's nuclear capabilities? Would Iran raise the bar on what weapons are given to its proxies, providing chemical or other weapons of mass destruction to Hizbollah, for example, because it feels it has a nuclear deterrent?
- How might the crisis escalate in this situation? What might happen if Iran attempts to use a ballistic missile test in this situation to demonstrate its resolve?
- How might India, Pakistan, China and/or Russia get pulled into a broader Middle East conflict?

##### **1115-1230: Excursion B: The Use of Nuclear Weapons to Deescalate a Conventional Conflict**

- What would be the consequences of Iran's testing or using a nuclear weapon during a crisis in an attempt to deter foreign military intervention and deescalate the situation?

- How would the rest of the region react to Iran's nuclear test?
- Under what other conditions – involving states and/or non-state actors – might we see the use of nuclear weapons in a Middle East/South Asia conflict/crisis in 2025?

1230-1315: Lunch

**1315-1430: Excursion C: Loose Nukes and the Consequences**

- What might be the consequences of a terrorist WMD attack in the region in 2025 under this scenario? How might such an act lead to a broader conflict or instability in the region?
- By 2025 might we see military interventions to secure a failing state's nuclear weapon or energy infrastructures? If so what could be the broader political-military consequences of such actions? In 2025, what might be the regional and international reaction to internal political disruption in a nuclear state such as Iran or Pakistan?
- What would be the implications of an "A.Q. Khan" scenario in Iran involving a leak from Iran's nuclear infrastructure to a non-state actor such as Hizbollah?
- What new security measures, arms control agreements, non-proliferation efforts, or other forms of international cooperation might emerge by 2025 in response to the spread of nuclear capabilities?

1430-1445: Break

**1445-1600: Observations and Conclusions**

- How do events in the rest of the world interact with the dynamics we have discussed in the Middle East and South Asia?
- How would alternative American declaratory deterrence policies impact these dynamics?
- Other issues?